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SUBJECT: ACEH'S SHARIA POLICE TARGETING AID WORKERS, WOMEN,
AND THE POOR

REF: JAKARTA 010572

Classified By: Ambassador B. Lynn Pascoe, Reasons
1.4 (d) and (g)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. After a year of peace in Aceh, negative fall-out from the imposition of Islamic law (sharia) under Aceh's special autonomy arrangement is apparent. While the Acehnese themselves have borne the brunt of the consequences, on August 17 sharia police raided the World Food Program's compound in Banda Aceh. Reasons given for the raid vary, but all parties agree that the religious police lacked the proper authorization or police escort. The incident is the latest in a string of examples illustrating increasingly harsh enforcement of sharia in Aceh. Although the sharia police have alienated many local Acehnese, the public reportedly still supports the concept of sharia, which seems likely to become more entrenched and fundamentalist.

¶2. (C) Comment. USAID facilities in Aceh are more secure and low-key than the UN's, and the police have assured USAID and RSO that no such raids will occur at USAID residences or offices. The UN representative in Jakarta apparently declined to press for a strong response, despite the encouragement of the Government of Indonesia's Aceh Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Office; the UN will, however, strongly protest if it happens again. RSO will return to Aceh to review security at the USAID office and residence, but stresses that the USG has tighter control over personnel than the UN and provides briefings to sensitize staff to local regulations. Aceh's regional police are using the WFP incident to try to reassert control over the Sharia office and its enforcers. End Summary/Comment.

¶3. (SBU) Even as Aceh celebrates the first anniversary of the peace accord between Acehnese rebels and the Government of Indonesia (reftel), post has received reports of negative fall-out from the imposition of Islamic law, or sharia. While the Acehnese themselves (particularly women and the poor) have borne the brunt of the consequences, foreigners are starting to be targeted. According to USAID's Aceh Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Office, local Acehnese newspapers have reported in recent weeks that the "sharia police," locally known as the Wilayatul Hisbah (WH), are planning to subject international NGOs and other expatriates residing in Aceh to more raids. Consequently, USAID believes that expatriates who live and work in the capital city of Banda Aceh are increasingly at risk for harassment by the WH.

Sharia Police Raid UN Compound

¶4. (SBU) On August 17 at 11:15 PM, members of the WH forcibly entered the World Food Program's (WFP) compound in Banda Aceh while the residents were sleeping. According to

UN staff, the WH justified the raid by alleging that there were drugs on the premise (no drugs were found). Although the WFP compound was guarded, USAID reports that the guards were not able to stop the WH. (In fact, the UN chief in Jakarta said that they may well have invited the WH in with no more than a perfunctory protest.) Following the raid, local UN staff called on the WH chief, who claimed no knowledge of the raid. UN-Aceh staff began pressing the Government of Indonesia's Aceh Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Office (BRR) to raise the raid (which the UN considers to be donor harassment) at the highest levels of local government, in the hope that Aceh's governor would intervene. The BRR in turn encouraged the UN to take a tough line to pressure the WH, but the UN Jakarta representative chose not to do so because of the ambiguous approach of the WFP's own guards. The UN did say, though, that there would be a strong protest if this were to happen again.

15. (SBU) In the days after the raid, the explanations of what happened became somewhat more ambiguous. An Acehese police contact told USAID representatives that the trigger for the raid was not drugs but rather allegations of Acehese women "cohabitating" with expatriate men in the compound. Separately, Consulate Medan police contacts said that the WH called the police for assistance in dealing with an urgent problem (Indonesians allegedly drinking alcohol inside the compound). Both contacts acknowledged, however, that when the police arrived at the WFP compound, the WH had already entered. Because the WH lacked the proper warrant to enter the compound, the regular police were upset with the sharia enforcers (and, according to USAID's contact, put an end to the raid).

16. (C) Local police told Consulate Medan that their chief

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met with the head of the Office for Islamic Sharia following the raid to advise him that the WH (who fall under the Sharia Office's supervision) were not permitted to act unilaterally. Rather, the WH were to advise the police of suspected sharia violations, and defer to the police for action. The police were openly critical of the WH to Consulate Medan staff, saying that "it is like if you give a child a knife to play with: he'll wave it around because he does not know how to use it or the damage it can cause." Aceh's governor also stressed to CG Medan that his office was taking the WFP incident very seriously and promised it would not happen again. The governor said that he had made clear to the Sharia Office chief that he and the WH must be respectful of foreign aid workers and more mindful of the limits of their authority. Both he and the police chief said that the WH were supposed to apologize to the WFP. (Note. Consulate Medan staff contacted the WFP, who confirmed that the WH did meet with the WFP after the raid. End Note.) The governor did caution, though, that NGO employees should also exercise discretion. When asked whether that meant that foreigners could not drink alcohol in their own residences, the governor clarified that they could, but should not "go outside with a bottle of whiskey" or walk down the street while obviously intoxicated, as apparently has happened.

17. (SBU) Whatever triggered the WFP raid, other international organizations are taking notice. On August 18, the Asian Development Bank's Field Security Officer emailed donors throughout Aceh, advising that the issue "isn't going to go away." He warned, based on input from various NGOs and donors, that continuing to house workers in co-ed guesthouses might lead to problems. Foreign workers should "not mistake community tolerance for community acceptance," he wrote. He continued that even in Banda Aceh, "mixed houses of foreigners get unannounced community visits and have pointed questions asked about marital status."

Who Are the Wilayatul Hisbah?

¶8. (C) Established in 2000 by a law on sharia implementation in Aceh, the Wilayatul Hisbah (WH) are broadly charged with upholding Islamic law dictates in all facets of daily life for Muslims, be it public morality, dress, judicial rulings, or respect for Islamic rituals (e.g., prayer, alms-giving, fasting during Ramadan). As an excellent recent report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) on sharia in Aceh notes, the WH do not have the legal authority to arrest sharia violators; statutorily, they must refer suspected transgressors to the police for action. Consulate Medan reports that while the WH are pressing for increased police powers, the police are actively resisting because they view this as an unacceptable dilution of their own powers. Moreover, members of the police and military pointedly refuse to accept the authority of the WH over them or their wives and girlfriends.

¶9. (U) A further complication lies in the composition of the WH itself. Initially, prospective members needed only meet broad criteria to be eligible for employment (for example, a member had to be a qualified imam with Indonesian citizenship who declared loyalty to Islamic law, the state ideology of Pancasila, and to the constitution). But because of the WH's lack of qualifications and their zealous approach, the WH rapidly lost public support. Consequently, the requirements for joining the WH have become more stringent: a candidate now must also be a law school graduate (Islamic or secular) or have studied for a minimum of seven years in an Islamic boarding school, or pesantren. More and more are being recruited from Banda Aceh's branch campus of the State Islamic Institute, which the ICG says has historically been moderate, although it is increasingly being infiltrated by the extremist Islamist organization Hizbut Tahrir.

Sharia Enforcement: Testing Limits

¶10. (U) Published reports, both from the ICG and in the mass media, have cited numerous examples of harsh WH sharia enforcement and vigilantism by self-appointed guardians of morality in Aceh. Although this has alienated some Acehnese, several indicators suggest that the public still supports the concept of sharia and that it will become even more entrenched. First, as elsewhere in Indonesia, candidates for local office are campaigning on platforms that promise extending Islamic law's reach. Second, ICG's Sidney Jones told us that the Office for Islamic Sharia, which has overall responsibility for the drafting, interpretation and implementation of Islamic law, is increasingly influenced by

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conservatives. Finally, Jones contends that moderates are hamstrung by the belief that all new sharia laws must have a basis in recognized Islamic texts. Since most textual interpretations are conservative, Acehnese draft laws are perhaps more dogmatic than they would have been if the experts had access to more liberal analyses.

¶11. (SBU) Although non-Muslims are technically not obliged to follow sharia in Aceh, WH actions suggest otherwise. Jones commented that for the first time since she began visiting Aceh in the late 1970s, she was instructed to cover her hair upon entering the WH offices. This discrepancy between what the law prescribes and what occurs in practice manifests itself in other ways as well. As the ICG report points out, the "little guy" (more often than not, women and the poor) tends to bear the brunt of the WH's offensives, while the bigger fish (officials engaging in large-scale corruption, for example) are largely immune. Meanwhile, the WH continues to grow: in Banda Aceh, the force nearly tripled in size during its first year, from 13 to 33 members; in the last month, it has grown further to 45 members, says Jones. Consulate Medan adds that over the past year, WH forces have been established in virtually every Acehnese county (kabupaten).

¶12. (SBU) USAID's facilities in Aceh are more secure and low-key than the UN's, with an Indonesian regular police presence on site, and USAID has contacted all of its project partners to caution them to be careful in managing their facilities. In follow-on meetings, the police have assured USAID and RSO that no such raids will occur at USAID residences or offices; should something be amiss, an emergency contact number has been provided. RSO stresses that the USG has tighter control over personnel than the UN, including a requirement that personnel be accounted for at all times, especially when traveling outside the city. Incoming personnel are also briefed about the need to be sensitive to local regulations and norms concerning alcohol, proper attire and fraternization. (Note. The WFP residence was apparently well-known for hosting weekly happy hours at which alcohol was served. By contrast, USAID does not host events of this type, nor are there any Acehnese female staff staying at the residence. End Note.) RSO is planning a visit to Aceh to discuss the UN incident with the police, and to review security at the USAID office and residence. RSO will also ensure that the proper procedures are in place should the WH confront any USAID employees or partners.

¶13. (C) Consulate Medan believes that the WFP episode is indicative of the WH testing the limits of their authority, a trend that is likely to continue. However, it is positive sign that the regional police are using the WFP incident to try to reassert control over the WH and the Sharia office, by reminding them that unilateral law enforcement actions undertaken by the sharia authorities are unlawful.

¶14. (U) This cable has been cleared by Consulate Medan.
PASCOE